

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Senator from North Dakota, Mr. DORGAN, recognized to speak for up to 30 minutes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask the time during the quorum call be equally divided between the majority and minority.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FOOD SECURITY CRISIS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to highlight the growing food security crisis which faces the United States and countries around the world. The short-term challenges we face as a result of this food security crisis are economic, strategic, political, and humanitarian. All of these challenges we face are already being faced by the most vulnerable in our society.

Here in the United States, this crisis comes on the heels of so many other trying circumstances confronting poor and working families across America. Our Nation is facing an economic recession and ever-rising unemployment rates. Many of those who remain employed find themselves working more hours and yet earning less because their wages have not kept up with inflation.

While their incomes have declined, the unprecedented cost of food and home energy has continued to soar. Many of these same families are also facing a mortgage and housing crisis which may force them to forego ownership of the house they once considered their slice of the American dream.

In short, many families, who years or even months ago were living comfortably, are now struggling to get by. As a result, the increase in food prices over the last several months has added one more pressure to already overburdened American families.

Increasingly, these families are stretched to the breaking point and are turning to Federal food assistance pro-

grams and food banks for some measure of relief. I have seen this trend repeated firsthand at food banks and in headlines across Pennsylvania.

A couple of examples. This is the headline of the Allentown Morning Call: "Heavy Demand at Food Banks, Kitchens Is a Grim Economic Indicator for Valley" [meaning the Lehigh Valley].

The Scranton Times Tribune: "More Seeking Food Stamps: Recipients in Pennsylvania Rise 9.5 percent."

The Philadelphia Inquirer: "Working Poor Struggle to Get By."

The Pittsburgh Tribune Review: "Demand for Food Stamps 'Very Close' to Record."

All across the State and across the country, it is the same headlines, the same story, the same economic trauma, because of a food security challenge we face. The data shows evidence of this disturbing trend. The demand for food stamps in Pennsylvania is skyrocketing.

Back in December of 2000, before this current President took office, approximately 757,000 Pennsylvanians—1 out of every 16—were enrolled in the food stamp program. But this past December, 7 years later, that number has risen dramatically to 1.4 million Pennsylvanians, accounting for 1 out of every 10 State residents. This trend shows no sign of stopping.

From December 2007 to March of 2008, Pennsylvania enrolled an average of 10,000 new individuals in food stamps every month, bringing the total enrollment to 1.18 million. But the situation in our State is far from unique. All across the country the number of individuals enrolling in the Food Stamp Program continues to rise at historic rates. From December 2006 to December 2007, more than 40 States saw recipient numbers rise, and in seven of those States the 1-year rate of growth topped 10 percent. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that starting in fiscal year 2009, 28 million Americans will be enrolled in the Food Stamp Program, the most ever enrolled in this program since its inception 40 years ago.

For the millions of Americans struggling from the effects of economic recession and rising food prices but making too much to qualify for food stamps, food banks can provide some measure of respite by providing food to those who could not otherwise afford it. Unfortunately, these food banks are struggling as well from a combination of increasing food prices, decreasing donations, and increased demand.

Wholesale prices for such foods as eggs, flour, rice, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products have dramatically spiked in the last 8 years. For food banks this price spike resulted in diminished purchasing power, translating into the availability of fewer supplies to meet an ever-increasing demand. While there is no accurate nationwide or even statewide data to show the effects increased prices and

increased demand are having on food bank supplies, we know from news articles, television stories, and firsthand reports from those working at food banks that this food security crisis has adversely affected emergency food assistance programs in every State.

The Senate-passed version of the 2007 Food and Energy Security Act, otherwise known as the farm bill, includes several measures intended to shore up Federal antihunger assistance programs. In fact, 67 percent of the funding of this bill is dedicated to protecting Americans from hunger. Provisions incorporated in the bill combat hunger, and they include measures to increase the value of food stamp benefits and language to increase the annual level of Federal commodity purchases for food banks from \$140 million to \$250 million.

Unfortunately, while the House and Senate are making strides in bringing their differences together, the longer it takes to complete this bill, the longer struggling Americans must wait for some measure of relief. Rising food prices and their effect on poor and working families are only part of the food security equation. While part of the increase in food prices can be attributed to the rising fuel and energy costs needed to produce and distribute these products, the far bigger driver behind those increased costs is lack of supply. Internationally, as well as domestically, food prices have been affected by severe shortages and record inflation of major food commodities such as corn, rice, soybeans, and wheat.

The head of the World Food Program has called the global food crisis a "silent tsunami," affecting the world's most vulnerable without regard to geography or traditional borders. World Bank President Robert Zoellick has said that surging food costs could translate into "seven lost years" in the fight against worldwide poverty.

Weather disasters and crop losses have caused devastating shortages across Africa and the Asia-Pacific, leading to historically low levels of world stocks of key commodities. Australia, one of the leading worldwide wheat producers and exporters, has endured several consecutive years of drought and last year lost 60 percent of its total wheat harvest. Floods in Asia have destroyed global production centers of wheat and rice as well.

The rapid economic growth of China and India have lifted millions out of poverty, but it has also succeeded in creating a new middle class complete with Western appetites for a diet of meat and protein. While foods such as rice and wheat remain a staple of the traditional diet, increased demand from China and India for meat produced from grain-fed animals is putting a strain on global supply and will only grow over time. Many of the commodity supplies these countries once exported are now being used for domestic production. Threatened by shortages at home, many countries have